



LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

Iowa Department of Education

No Child Left Behind waiver request

➔ What it's about

Iowa accepted the U.S. Department of Education's invitation last September to apply for a waiver from the rigid accountability measures of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The Iowa Department of Education (DE) intends to request a waiver by February 21. In exchange, the DE is working with key stakeholder groups to design a bold, comprehensive accountability system that **puts student achievement first** but also emphasizes **student growth**, better **fits Iowa's context**, is **aligned with our long-range goals**, and builds on existing state efforts such as the **Iowa Core**.

This is not a retreat from accountability. While NCLB has advanced some important reforms by shifting attention to the country's neediest students, it's also widely acknowledged that the law has created some unrealistic measures in its attempt to hold the nation's public schools accountable.

For example, NCLB calls for states to demonstrate 100 percent student proficiency on tests in reading and math by 2014. While this is an important and worthy goal, we must recognize that students come to school with different starting points.

In Iowa, we still expect our schools to meet high standards. But we need a fair approach that emphasizes and recognizes growth and progress, rather than the current system of blaming and shaming schools that fall short of student proficiency targets.

States must address these principles in their waiver applications:

- Adopt college- and career-ready expectations (standards) for all students.
- Redesigning the accountability system to fairly identify successes and target supports to schools that are struggling.
- Improve evaluation and support systems for teachers and administrators to provide timely and individualized feedback to improve teaching and leadership.

➔ How the waiver fits with Iowa's education reform legislation

Education legislation introduced by Gov. Terry Branstad and Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds for the 2012 session represents a long-term, reform-minded policy direction that builds from Iowa's strengths and adopts improvements with lessons learned from the highest-performing and fast-improving systems globally.

The legislation also sets the stage for a successful NCLB waiver request in the following ways:

- **Follows through on the Iowa Core.** The Iowa Core represented an important first step to establishing high expectations for all students, but we must re-engage in this work and align quality instruction to these standards statewide.
- **Redesigns the assessments.** Our system of measures must be tightly aligned with the Iowa Core and must emphasize applying knowledge to complex problems, not just memorization. Better assessment systems will be computer-based, will take less time, and will provide instant results to improve teaching. Students also will have an investment in these assessments.
- **College-ready measures.** The Governor's proposal would have all 11th grade students take a college entrance exam. This exam would replace the current 11th grade assessment, would

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give students one of the keys they need for college admission, and would provide state system data on how well our schools are preparing students for college.

- **Career-ready measures.** The Governor's proposal provides measures of career-readiness for students who opt to take these assessments.
- **Measuring student growth.** The Governor's plan includes a sophisticated student growth measure called value-added. Value-added measures are not a new test, but a way of analyzing test data that takes into account student background and demographics.
- **Redesigned teacher and administrator evaluations.** A new evaluation system would align Iowa's teacher evaluation system from college preparation through career teaching, would put Iowa's evaluation frameworks on par with national standards, and would streamline the evaluation process. In addition, evaluations would occur annually for every educator, rather than the three-times-a-decade approach currently in place.

A successful waiver request hinges on bold changes in state accountability plans and real efforts to improve our education system. While the Branstad-Reynolds administration's education package and the NCLB waiver are different proposals, significant areas of overlap exist.

➔ The national context

Congress passed the landmark NCLB law in 2001. Since then, growing frustration with NCLB's accountability components has fueled pressure to overhaul the law. However, the reauthorization of NCLB is four years overdue, and most are skeptical about the prospects of bipartisan Congressional action on NCLB this year. Even if an agreement were to be signed into law soon, any real changes in NCLB for states could take years.

The NCLB waiver opportunity extended by Education Secretary Duncan is the only means of timely relief for states. A federal timeline gave states three options to apply: November 14, 2011, February 21, 2012, and following the end of the 2011-12 school year. Eleven states applied for the waiver in the first round. Twenty-seven states (including Iowa), the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico are expected to request waivers by February 21, 2012.

➔ Iowa's process

The Iowa Department of Education sought expertise from a number of education stakeholder groups to put together the strongest application. This included input from the state's education association groups (ISEA, IASB, SAI), the business community, Area Education Agencies, and local educators and community leaders.

Iowa's waiver is still very much a work in progress, and it changes daily in response to feedback; however, a draft version received high marks from national experts brought together by the Council of Chief State School Officers to review proposals and provide input on January 22-23.

DE officials are walking Iowans through the waiver process in a series of public meetings. People who are unable to attend the meetings are encouraged to turn to the DE homepage, at www.educateiowa.gov, to watch video presentations and read through materials about the process.

Once Iowa's waiver has been submitted, the application will be reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education. Based on the experiences of other states, we expect to be directed to revise and resubmit the application in the summer of 2012.

An overview of federal guidance for the waiver can be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility>

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